

Message Text

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SUBJECT: VENEZUELA, TORRIJOS AND THE POLITICS OF LATIN
AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

SUMMARY: THE VENEZUELAN AMBASSADOR TO PANAMA, IN HIS TOAST
AT THE VENEZUELAN NATIONAL DAY RECEPTION HERE, MADE
POINTED REMARKS ABOUT DEMOCRACY IN PANAMA. FOREIGN
MINISTER GONZALEZ-REVILLA TOOK THE OFFENSIVE IN
RESPONSE, FORECASTING SUBSTANTIVE MOVES TOWARD
DEMOCRATIZATION OF PANAMA'S POLITICAL PROCESSES.
END SUMMARY.

1. FONMIN GONZALEZ-REVILLA HAD A MESSAGE FOR THE FOREIGN
DIPLOMATS GATHERED AT THE JULY 5 VENEZUELAN NATIONAL
DAY RECEPTION IN PANAMA CITY. SPEAKING IN REPLY
TO THE TOAST OF VENEZUELAN AMBASSADOR REYNALDO
LEANDRO, GONZALEZ-REVILLA STRONGLY ECHOED AND AMPLIFIED
GENERAL TORRIJOS' REMARKS ABOUT PANAMA'S POLITICAL
FUTURE MADE IN COLON EARLIER IN THE DAY.

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2. IN HIS OPENING TOAST, VENEZUELAN AMBASSADOR LEANDRO
RAISED QUITE A FEW EYEBROWS BY AN UNUSUALLY STRONG,
LECTURING STATEMENT ON THE VIRTUES OF DEMOCRATIC
FREEDOMS, CITING VENEZUELA AS WELL AS COLOMBIA AND
COSTA RICA AS EXAMPLES WHICH PANAMA SHOULD EMULATE.
HIS REMARKS ALSO INCLUDED A COURAGEOUS REFERENCE
TO THE NEED TO HONOR HUMAN RIGHTS RIGOROUSLY.

3. USING CAREFULLY CHOSEN WORDS TO THE AUDIENCE, WHICH INCLUDED JOURNALISTS ALERTED BY THE FOREIGN MINISTRY TO EXPECT A SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL STATEMENT, GONZALEZ-REVILLA REPLIED THAT PANAMA WAS COMMITTING ITSELF TO RETURN TO THE ROAD OF DEMOCRACY, LEGALIZED POLITICAL PARTIES AND A FREER ELECTORAL PROCESS.

4. DURING THE YEARS OF BATTLE FOR NATIONAL LIBERATION, THE PRESENT POLITICAL SYSTEM WAS ESSENTIAL TO MAINTAIN NATIONAL UNITY, GONZALEZ SAID. NOW THAT THE BATTLE HAS BEEN WON, IT IS TIME TO RESUME THE NORMAL PLAY OF POLITICAL FORCES. THE PREVIOUS POLITICAL SYSTEM WAS NOT OVERTHROWN, HE CONTINUED; IT FELL BY ITSELF. THAT SYSTEM WILL NOT BE ALLOWED TO RETURN; INSTEAD A NEW AND BETTER SYSTEM WILL BE DEvised.

5. GONZALEZ-REVILLA DID NOT SAY, OF COURSE, THAT THIS MOVE TO DEMOCRACY WOULD BEGIN RIGHT AWAY. GENERAL TORRIJOS HAS ALREADY MADE IT CLEAR THAT THE AUGUST ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS AND THE OCTOBER VOTE FOR PRESIDENT WILL FIRST BE ACCOMPLISHED BY THE GROUND RULES PRESENTLY IN EFFECT. NOR DID HE REPEAT TORRIJOS' STATEMENT ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE 1984 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION MIGHT BE BY POPULAR VOTE. BUT THE FONMIN DID SEEM TO MAKE A SPECIAL EFFORT TO ADVISE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE ASSEMBLED REPRESENTATIVES OF FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS THAT THE DECISION TO BEGIN MOVING TOWARD POLITICAL

DEMOCRACY LATE THIS FALL WAS FIRM, AND THAT THE GOP HAD MORE THAN JUST COSMETIC MEASURES IN MIND. HE CLOSED BY SAYING THAT TORRIJOS' PRINCIPAL REMAINING GOAL THE POST-TREATY PERIOD WAS TO RETURN THE COUNTRY TO CIVILIAN DEMOCRACY.

6. VENEZUELA HAS RAISED SOME PANAMANIAN HACKLES OF LATE, AS IT SEEMS TO BE SIGNALING THAT ITS PAST UNEQUIVOCAL SUPPORT FOR PANAMA'S CAUSE IN THE EFFORT TO ACHIEVE THE CANAL TREATIES, DOES NOT EXTEND TO THE CONTINUED SUPPORT OF TORRIJOS AND THE PRESENT POLITICAL SYSTEM. PRESIDENT PEREZ WAS THE ONLY CHIEF OF STATE PRESENT FOR THE CARTER VISIT WHO MADE A POINT OF MEETING WITH OPPOSITION LEADERS, AND HIS AMBASSADOR HAS BEEN ANYTHING BUT SHY IN TELLING ANYONE WILLING TO LISTEN THAT THE VENEZUELA-PANAMA HONEYMOON IS OVER UNLESS TORRIJOS IS WILLING TO INSTITUTE POLITICAL CHANGE. JORDEN

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